



## Youth Councils: Empowering Young People as Agents of Change

More than 50 percent of the world's population is younger than 30. This demographic is a potential driver of economic and social progress. It is also a potential challenge to stability and security. To play positive roles, young people must be informed, active participants in their societies--economically, civically, politically, and socially. The Office of Global Youth Issues leads the U.S. Department of State's efforts on this front. As the Department of State conducts diplomacy in a transforming world, we encourage young people to play an important role in the decisions that affect them. By engaging youth as partners and listening to their ideas, concerns, and aspirations, we can empower young people to become changemakers.

Around the world, U.S. embassies and consulates are establishing Youth Councils as a mechanism to partner with emerging young leaders to address our shared challenges. From Brasilia to Baghdad and Stockholm to Suva, diverse cross-sections of local youth--including students, innovators, civil society members, artists, and government representatives--are applying their entrepreneurial spirit by collaborating to create youth-led responses to concerns they face in their communities. They also provide U.S. diplomats with their honest perspectives on some of the major issues of the day, from the economy to elections. In December 2012, former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton launched the 50<sup>th</sup> Youth Council in Dublin, Ireland, a milestone that highlighted these councils as important channels of communication between young leaders and U.S. policymakers.

The more than 50 Youth Councils in existence are fora for informing policy discussions and U.S. diplomatic missions' programming. Youth Council members drive the development of their own action plans on topics such as youth employment, civic and political engagement, conflict resolution, women's empowerment, civilian security, and education by identifying issues and concerns that resonate with their peers and the local community. These motivated young people are collaborating to create positive changes in their societies:

- Youth Council members in Madagascar designed and conducted public opinion surveys about ethics in politics and used the responses to draft a Code of Conduct for politicians.
- Youth Councils in Latvia and Macedonia are connecting through an exchange program that examines solutions to youth unemployment in both countries.
- In Algeria, Youth Council members arranged a workshop to teach youth résumé-writing and job interview skills.
- Youth Council members in Nepal have increased awareness about the work of young community activists and the legal rights of Nepalese women via weekly radio programs.
- In Mexico, Youth Councils in Monterrey and Nuevo Laredo are working to prevent at-risk youth from joining gangs.
- The Youth Council in Cambodia will collaborate with the private sector to focus on enhancing employment opportunities and internships for youth.

The Department of State is committed to addressing an increasingly wide range of pressing political, economic, and social issues through sustained partnership with the young people who are integral to the process of making diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century more responsive, inclusive, and effective.